The Pope alerted the bishops that his biggest concern in Spain is the far right that tries to "instrumentalize the Church"

In his first meeting with the leadership of the Episcopal Conference last November, the Pontiff warned of the ultra groups that want to "win the Catholic vote"

Pope Leo XIV, in his meeting with the executive commission of the Spanish Bishops' Conference, on November 17 at the Vatican.
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JULIO NÚÑEZ | **ÍÑIGO DOMÍNGUEZ**

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On November 17, the nine Spanish bishops who make up the executive commission of the Episcopal Conference (EEC) attended the Vatican at their first meeting with Leo XIV, six months after their election, and the Pope surprised them by making clear their priorities and going straight to the point: he said that his greatest concern at this time in Spain "is the ultra-right ideology", as confirmed to EL PAÍS two sources familiar with what happened in the meeting. During the meeting, the Pontiff alerted the Spanish prelates of the rise of these political groups and how they "seek to win the Catholic vote" and "instrumentalize the Church", according to the same sources. This message since then marks the line that the Pope wants the Spanish episcopate to follow before the speech of parties such as Vox and ultraconservative groups against the reception and regularization of immigrants.

"The Pope sees that the far right uses believers for their purposes," a prelate says. In their speeches, these groups accuse bishops of betraying the faithful for supporting the "anti-Christian" policies of the government as a "contribute agreed" by cases of paedophilia or "as a consequence of the aid system" they receive. They also launch criticism against the episcopate for keeping "silence in the face of the advance of Islamism" and even propose to believers to stop putting the X in the box of the declaration of income for the Church. These messages began to spread last summer to try to delegitimize the ecclesial hierarchy and attract votes.

After their meeting with the Pontiff, the bishops returned from Rome with that papal guideline to be aware of the intentions of the far-right groups, and also with the mission of resolving the conflict with the Spanish Government as soon as possible to compensate the victims of paedophilia, a matter that had been stuck for a year and a half, for the refusal of the EEC to assume the compensation of hundreds of victims that it does not consider credible. In the background, there was the possibility of a trip of the Pope to Spain in June, which is not yet safe or official until Leo XIV sees the situation clear, although daily it is already taken for granted in Madrid and Barcelona, cities that he would visit, according to the Episcopal Conference on its website. A visit to the United States also appeared closed and two weeks ago was ruled out in a statement from the Vatican press room.

The effects of the Pope's orders were immediately seen. On 8 January, the EEC retracted everything that has been said so far and shut down an agreement with the Government to compensate all victims of paedophilia. Days later, on 27 of the same month, the bishops supported the plan of regularization of immigrants approved by the Executive in the Council of Ministers and harshly attacked by Vox. The Church, it should be noted, has been one of the institutions that has pushed the most in recent years to implement this measure to resolve the situation of more than half a million migrants.

It was the first time that the bishops met with this pope, after

the 12 years of Francis, who never had a good relationship with the Spanish Church, since he knew that very few bishops were in tune with him. In fact, he never traveled to Spain. The EEC leadership went to Rome this time without knowing what weather was going to be found in the meeting, because, in addition, it had just come to light, uncovered by EL PAÍS, the case of the bishop of Cádiz, Rafael Zornoza, accused of paedophilia.

The president of the bishops, Luis Argüello, opened the meeting by updating the Pontiff of the situation of the Spanish Church. He spoke to him about general issues, such as secularization or demographic problems, and also about cases of clergy paedophilia. Leo XIV listened in silence and when he spoke pointed out the matter that he was most concerned and caught the bishops dislodged: the rise of the far right. “We have seen that Robert Prevost knows Spain well,” Argüello told reporters on departure.

For Leo XIV, fighting polarization, inside and outside the Church, is one of his priorities and sees the rise of the extreme right one of the main risks, especially because of its demonization of immigrants. In addition, at this time, some of the most direct attacks on Leo XIV come from Spanish ultraconservative digital portals, which already had prominence before the conclave with a campaign against him, when he was only Cardinal Robert Prevost. They used a case of paedophilia occurred in 2022 in the Peruvian diocese of Chiclayo, when the future pope was the bishop of the diocese, to accuse him of cover-up. That is, Leo XIV knows well how these groups act because he has suffered them in person.

The Minister of the Presidency, Justice and Relations with the Courts, Félix Bolaños, in the center, together with the president of the Episcopal Conference, Luis Argüello, on the left, and the president of the Spanish Conference of Religious, Jesús Díaz Sariego, during the signing of an agreement for the reparation of victims of abuse in the Church.
DANIEL GONZALEZ (EFE)

It was a maneuver that began in Peru in the wake of the dissolution of the Sodalite of Christian Life, a powerful ultraconservative group with sect features and business frameworks, accused of numerous cases of sexual assault. It was liquidated by Francisco in 2025 and was helped by Prevost in the face of strong internal opposition to the connections of this organization.

"I have seen these groups with my eyes deliver pamphlets in Rome against Prevost," says a cardinal recalling the days of the conclave. "For the Pope these groups are a real concern," confirms another Vatican source. It is a network of far-right sectors, connected to each other, in the United States, Mexico, Peru and Spain, which moves a lot of money and was already very active against Pope Francis, who was seen in this ultraconservative world practically as the antichrist.

What's more, recently declassified files from pedophile financier Jeffrey Epstein have revealed that between 2018 and 2019 he was coordinating with Steve Bannon, a u.S. far-right ideologue, to fund far-right populist parties in Europe and attack Pope Francis. In those years, very aggressive campaigns were deployed against the Argentine pontiff. Bannon wrote in a message, "We will bring down Francis."

Leo XIV knows that he was not the candidate of the most conservative sector in the conclave, who accepted him as a lesser evil, and that he is under observation until he checks whether he follows the path of Francis or not. That is why he moves so cautiously, because at any moment the truce can end and a new offensive against him is unleashed. He is already suffering from silent strides, he is strained with phrases in the speeches, Vatican sources point out. "But study the situation and when it acts, it acts," they explain.

Argüello, a demon for the Phalanx

In Spain the strategy of the far right in recent months is progressing, especially after the approval of the regularization of immigrants. "The entire oligarchy hates the Spanish people," was one of Vox's proclamations on social media when Argüello posted a video at the end of last January supporting the regularization of immigrants. The Spanish phalange of the JONS took a step further and disseminated on X a video created with artificial intelligence with an image of the president of the bishops mutating in a smiling demon between flames. With the accusation that "the Episcopal Conference is not the Church" and that "it is more with the devil than with the poor."

The cardinal of Madrid, José Cobo, is another of the objectives of the attacks of ultra-Catholic associations such as Traditionalist Fellow Carlist for another matter: the resignification of the old Valley of the Fallen, now called of Cuelgamuros. In the networks, ultra profiles define him as "traitor" and accuse him of giving in to the interests of the Government. These groups have also called demonstrations, some in front of the EEC headquarters in Madrid, with banners that said "bishops, traitors, you are desecrators".

> Yes, by encouraging the so-called effect, the Episcopal Conference is supporting:
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> ���The human trafficking.
>
> 🤑 The payment of unworthy salaries.
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> 🏙️ The speculation with housing.
>
> ❌ The end of our culture and identity.
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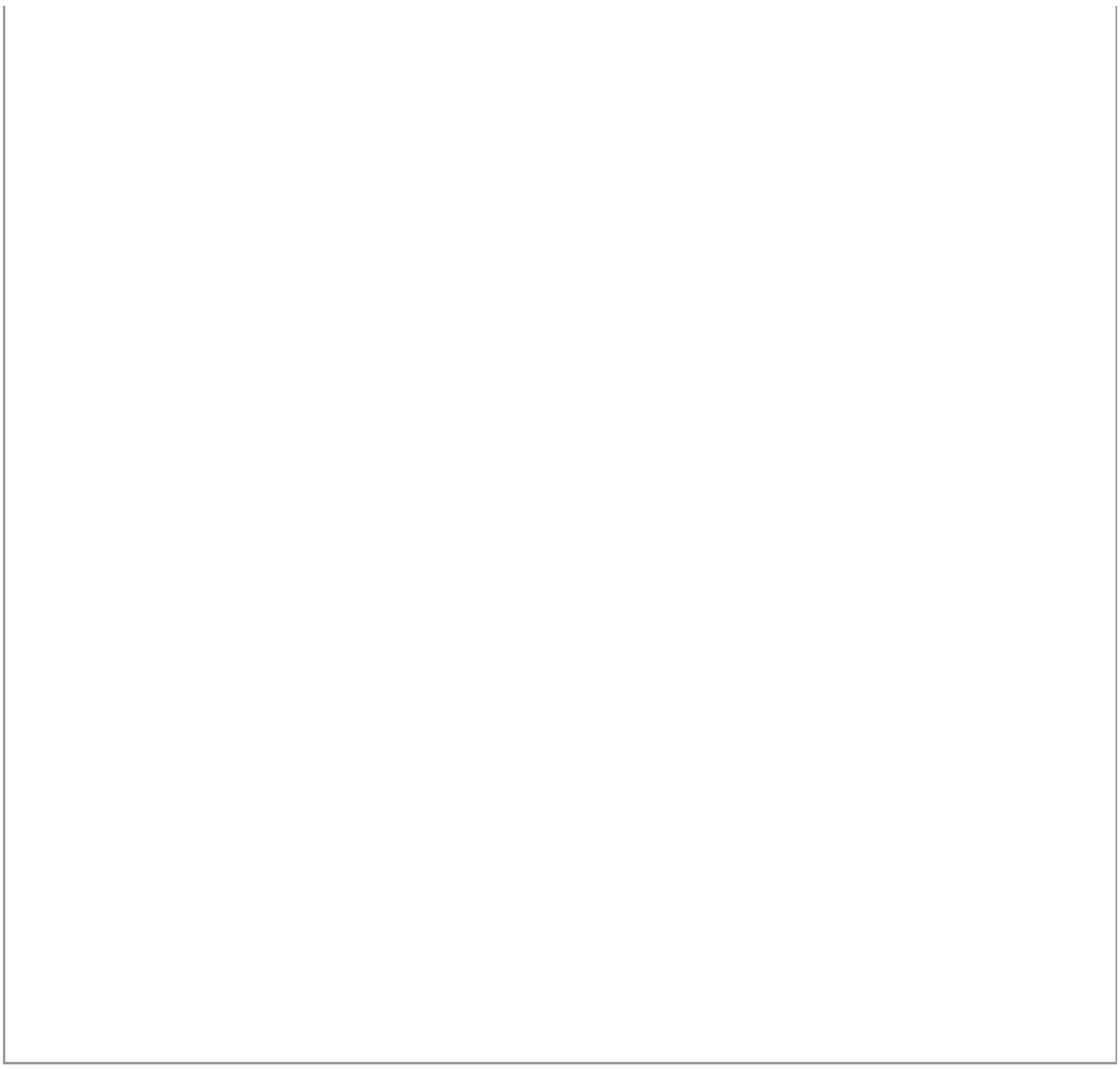
> 🔫 The violence and insecurity that our streets have taken.
>
> And no, the... https://t.co/RRxMyc1B pic.twitter.com/1vucChCzas
>
> — Spanish phalange of the JONS (@fedelasjons) January 28, 2026

The crusade against the church hierarchy from far-right parties and groups, which proudly define themselves as Catholics, began the first week of last August. The PP and Vox approved in the Murcia City Council of Jumilla an amendment to prevent the celebration of Muslim festivities in municipal spaces, as in previous years.

One of the first reactions was from the EEC, which defined the measure as "a discrimination that cannot occur in democratic societies." The sentence was a punch for Vox. In response, their leader, Santiago Abascal, attacked the bishops: "I do not know if their position is because of the public income they receive or for the cases of paedophilia."

The bishops did not shut up and censored the ultra party's anti-immigration speech. The secretary general and spokesman of the EEC, César García Magán, defined Vox as "ideological heirs" of Francoism who use the same proclamations that were used decades ago against the Church and "that should never be heard again in the history of Spain", especially in the mouth of "sedients" Catholics. The Archbishop of Tarragona, Joan Planellas, also replied to Abascal that "a xenophobic cannot be a true Christian."

Some of the bishops of the executive commission who later met with the pope in November demonstrated along the same lines. The archbishop of Valencia, Enrique Benavent, called it "immoral" to criminalize "some people for the fact of belonging to a collective" and demanded that these "activities and behaviors that, sometimes, from public places and powers, are encouraged be denounced." However, in the visit to the Vatican there was also the archbishop of Oviedo, who has never hidden what he thinks about the migration phenomenon: "It doesn't fit

all," he recently published on X.